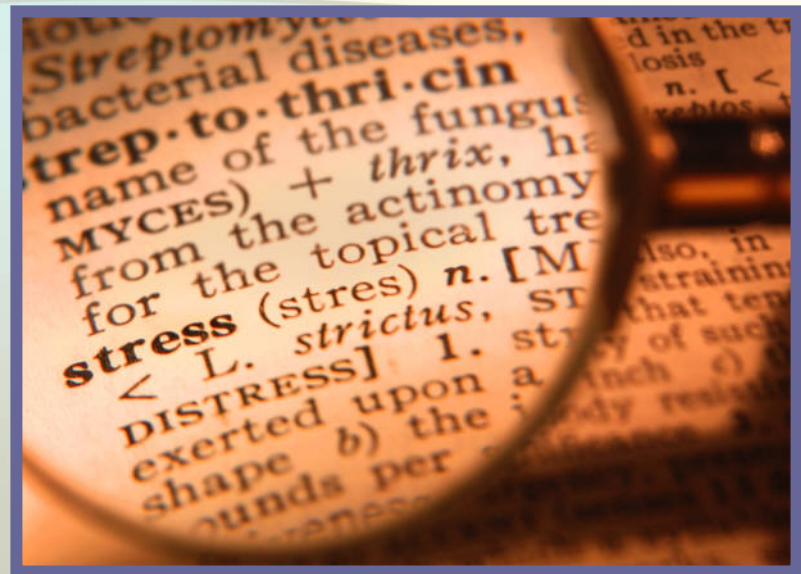# Stress Management

For Resilient Living

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The Nature of Stress

- **What is Stress?**
- **Stress is a medical term for a wide range of physiological and psychological stimuli**
- **"You can't stop the waves but you can learn to surf"**
- ***Leaning* into the difficulty**
- **Art of Stress Management**

Mind/Body Wellness

- **"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heav'n of Hell and a Hell of Heav'n" – Milton, Paradise Lost**

- **Descartes: soul (mind) are separate entities**

- **A reductionistic approach to the body and health**

- **Nesting and Connectedness**
  - **well mind, well body**

General Adaptation Syndrome

- **Selye's Research in 1936**
- **3 stages**
- **Alarm Reaction: the organism detects the external stimuli**
  - **adrenaline**
  - **Muscles tense, heart beats faster, breathing becomes shallow and quick, perspiration increases, eyes dilate, the stomach may clench**
  - **Flight or fight response**
  - **Return to homeostasis**

General Adaptation Syndrome

- **Adaptation: the body engages defensive countermeasures against the stressor**
  - **The body's response to long-term arousal**
  - **Further secretion of hormones that increase blood sugar levels to sustain energy and raise blood pressure (eg. Corticosteroids)**
  - **Over time, prolonged periods in this stage lead to disease of various kinds**
    - **Without periods of rest and relaxation to counterbalance the stress response, sufferers begin to exhibit fatigue, concentration lapses, irritability**

General Adaptation Syndrome

- **Exhaustion: the body begins to run out of defenses**
  - **As prolonged stressors continue, the body enters the exhaustion stage**
  - **In this stage, the body has run out of energy and immunity**
  - **The body experiences "adrenal exhaustion" and blood sugar levels decrease as the adrenals become depleted**
    - **This leads to decreased resilience, progressive mental and physical exhaustion, illness and collapse**
    - **Damaging "stress hormones"**
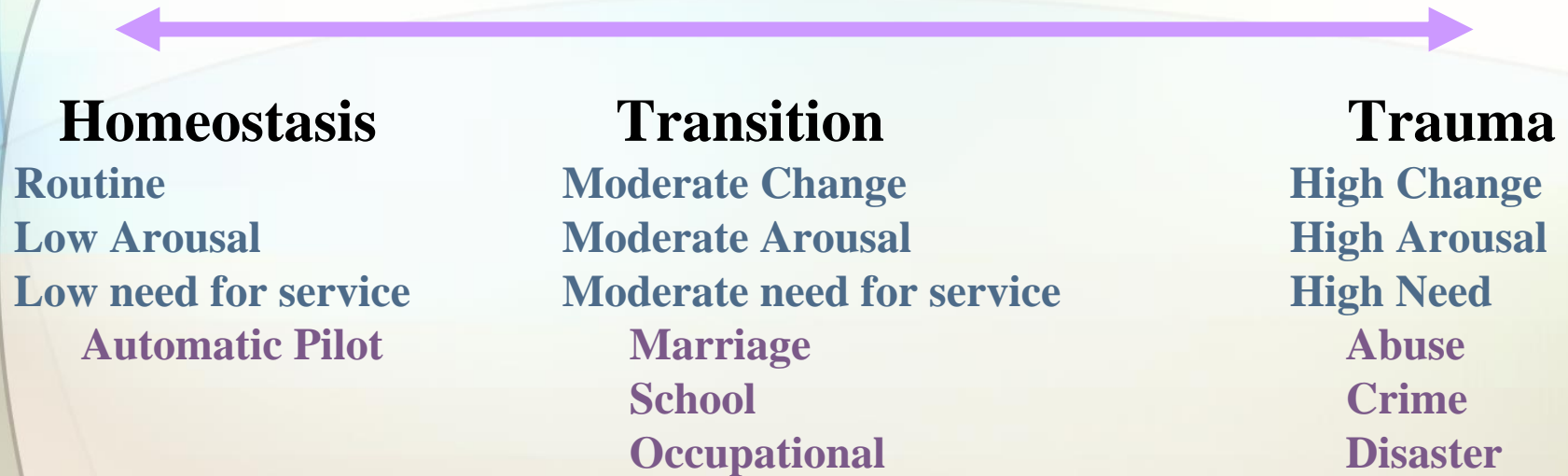
General Adaptation Syndrome

- **Stress and Mental Health**
  - **Continual stress disrupts the repair cycle**
  - **Instead of shutting off once the stressor is removed, chronically high cortisol can lead to fatigue and depression**
  - **Cortisol interferes with serotonin activity**

- **Stress and Physical Health**
  - **Chronically high cortisol leads to a suppression of the immune system**
    - **Increased production of interleukin-6, an immune system messenger**

- **The Good News**

Resilience Theory

- **Growth Under Stress: Resilience**
- **Resilience is one's innate ability to thrive despite uncontrollable threats to wellbeing**
- **Growth in response to stress occurs in 3 main domains:**
  - **Perceptions of self**
  - **Relationships with others**
  - **Cognitive approach to life of greater appreciation, seeking, and new priorities**

The Continuum of Adjustment

Homeostasis
Routine
Low Arousal
Low need for service
  Automatic Pilot

Transition
Moderate Change
Moderate Arousal
Moderate need for service
  Marriage
  School
  Occupational

Trauma
High Change
High Arousal
High Need
  Abuse
  Crime
  Disaster

- **Research Based Models for Growth Under Stress**
  - **The Injury Metaphor**
  - **Risk/Protective model: risk and protective factors interact**
  - **Enhanced recovery potential: repeated exposure to stressor forces development of internal resources**
  - **Resilience-Process Model: disruptive events catalyze a reorganization of self and beliefs that facilitate coping with the stressor**
    - **Successful episodes of disruption and reorganization lead to enhanced internal resources and coping**

A Process Model

Homeostasis > Confrontation > Search > Reorganization of Self and Meaning

Beginning
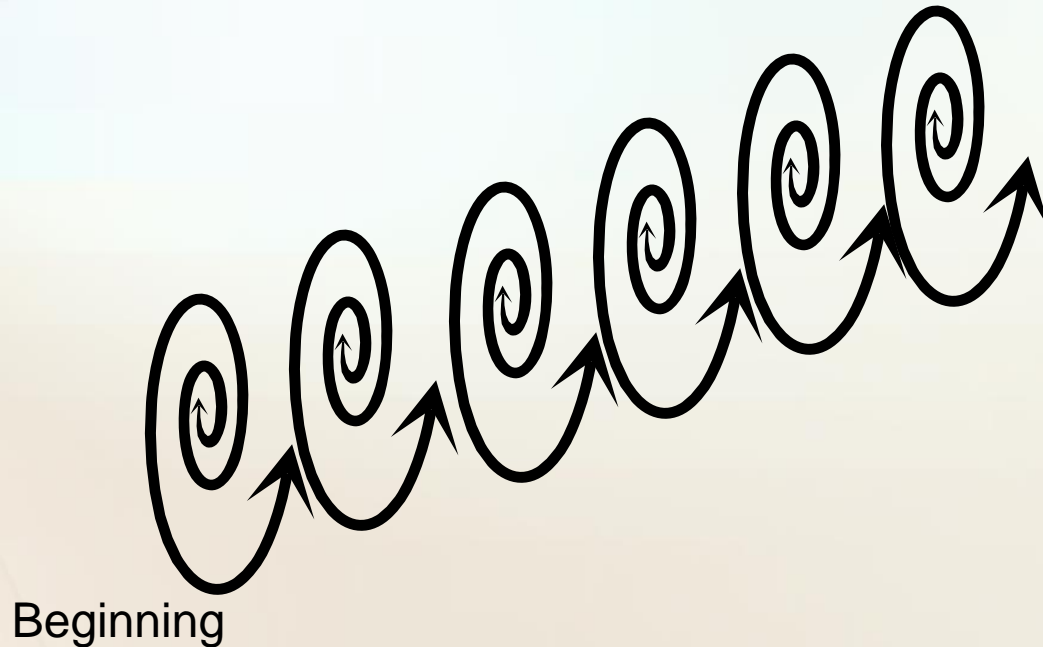
How Do We Become Resilient?

- **Active Reorganization**
  - **Active attempts to restructure aspects of self, feelings, self-concepts, relationships, and meaning systems**

- **Transforming the Inner World: Inner Work**
  - **Moving toward new aspects of self and experience**

  - **1. Creating New Layers of Self**
    - **New aspects to oneself that provided wellbeing $\Rightarrow$ Madeline: "Breaking down of that person, building it bigger and better . . . That's when healing, teaching, wisdom comes in, is when you're pliable like that."**
    - **For example: Ethnic Identity, A New Self Role (such as, "I am a Tai Chi student")**

  - **2. Solidifying and Developing Resources**
    - **Acquiring new skills for self-regulation**
    - **Self-care**
    - **Social Support, Trusted Advisors**
    - **Giving Back to Community**

Stress Self-Assessment

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." ~ World Health Organization, 1948

The Relaxation Response

- **Herbert Benson, MD @ Harvard Medical School**

- **A counterbalancing mechanism to the stress response**

- **Relaxation Response: physical state of deep res with changes in physiology and emotions**
  - **Metabolism decreases**
  - **Heart beats slower and muscles relax**
  - **Breathing slows**
  - **Blood pressure decreases**

- **Techniques: imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, prayer, mindfulness meditation, exercise, breath focus**

Stress Thoughts: How to Diffuse

- ## Positive Thinking
    - **How did we get so stressed?**
    - **Mind/Body Connection: much of our stress and emotional suffering comes from our mind**
        - **The way we think about a situation has emotional and physiological consequences**

- ## Cognitive/behavioral Techniques
    - ## <u>All or Nothing Thinking</u>
        - **Black-and-white categories**
        - **"I didn't do a great job on the project I was working on. I guess I'm bad at what I do."**
        - **Cultivating Shades of Grey**
        - **"My performance wasn't the best that it could have been. But there were good aspects that I can be proud of."**

- **<u>Magnification (Catastropizing) or Minimization</u>**
  - **You exaggerate the importance of things or shrink things until they appear tiny**
  - **"My friend is smart, accomplished, attractive. Next to her, I just don't seem that great."**
  - **Removing the Filter!**
  - **Ask: How would someone else beside me see this?**
    - **"I am a giving person to my family and many people see me as unique and accomplished."**

Experiential Work

- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

"Diseases of the soul are more dangerous and more numerous than those of the body." – Cicero

Thanks for Attending Our Seminar!
Please be in Attendance for our Next Offering:
Building Self Confidence
May 16, 2006.

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